THE EYE-OPENER

An Engaged Couple See Each Other In A New Light

By TOM MASSON

Horace Trumbell's horse, although a nervous animal, usually stood without hitching. So he just put the lines around the whip and walked up the path to the Newton cottage. The Newtons were known as the "new folks." They had lived in the village only two years—long enough, however, for Horace to fall in love with Lyda, and to have arrived at an understanding with her. Horace had to wait for some time after he raised the brass knocker of the cottage door. Finally Lyda opened it. Her hair was disarranged. Her dress bore evidence of having been hastily put on. Her hands were of the kind known as parboiled.

She blushed slightly.

"Excuse me for keeping you waiting," she said.

"That's all right," said Horace. "I took a chance. But I thought I'd like to drive over to the fair at Amsbury's today and maybe you'd go along. It's a nice day," he added, looking up at the sky. "We can drive over in an hour, and that'll give us a couple of hours there, and we can be back by seven o'clock."

Lyda hesitated.

"I'd like to go," she said, "but—come in and sit down a minute."

He followed her into the parlor, and she turned to him apologetically.

"We're cleaning house," she said.

"Of course—" began Horace. He came from generations of well-to-do farmers to whom house-cleaning was sacred. A stern sense of duty compelled him to be merciless, even to himself, where the work of the house was concerned.

"You wait," interrupted Lyda, hurrying out.

"Mother," she called. "Horace is here and wants me to drive over to their fair."

Mrs. Newton came running in, her hands dripping, wiping them on her apron as she came. Her face fell.

"I s'pose you'll have to go," she said dubiously. "It's kinder too bad, right in the midst of things. Still—"

Horace stepped out from the parlor.

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Newton. "You see, we're kinder upset today. But you go on," she exclaimed to Lyda. "I can finish up."

"Perhaps you'd better not," said Horace. "I—"

"I'll stay if you say so," said Lyda to her mother.

"No; I wouldn't have you do such a thing for the world. You go with Horace. It's only right you should. Run up stairs."

Lyda's face beamed. With the enthusiasm of youth, she had already cast aside the atmosphere of work, and was taking on rapidly the hue of pleasure.

"I guess I will," she exclaimed.

"That's right," said Mrs. Newton, who did not let her disappointment over the interruption in their task cloud her daughter's departure. "You run right up stairs and change your clothes, and don't keep Horace waiting."

"Perhaps—" began Horace. But at this moment he heard the horn of a big motor car in the distance and, second nature as it was for him to look out for his horse, he opened the door and rushed out to guard him while the machine was passing. Lyda ran upstairs to change her clothes.

She was exceedingly deft, and this process was completed almost by the time Horace was back.

"I'm ready," she said with a smile, trying on her hat. "God-by, Mother."

"Good-by," said Mrs. Newton, standing in the doorway. "And have a real good time."

Horace started up the horse and they drove off.

Lyda, free from the restraint of home duties and alive to the beauty of the world, began to chatter. Horace, however, was unusually silent.

"What's the matter?" she asked at last. "You don't seem right."

"I was thinking perhaps you ought not to have come."

"Nonsense. Mother didn't mind. Besides—"

She looked at him curiously. Lyda away from home, free from responsibility, was different from Lyda at home, full of duty.

"Don't let's think of anything disagreeable," she said. "It's fine to be out a day like this."

With a coquettish movement she leaned close to Horace. But for some reason he was not responsive.

"If I had known you was going to be this way," she said with a slight touch of resentment, "I don't know as I'd have come. Can't you have a good time? Can't you forget work?"

"No," said Horace gloomily, "I cant. I can't help thinking that perhaps you ought not to have come. It seemed too bad to leave your mother."

"Well, you needn't worry about that. What did you ask me for, anyway?"

"I didn't suppose you was housecleaning."

"Well, what of it? I can go if I want to. Besides,"—she was becoming angry—"you have no right to talk to me like this. I don't want to go now. You can take me back."

Horace, however, had different views. Now that they had set out on their journey he was determined to see it through. His rigid masculine sense of duty made it impossible, however, for him to throw off the feeling that Lyda had not done right. Unconsciously, imperatively, he was asking himself the question whether, after all, this girl who was ready at the slightest call to leave her mother alone "in the lurch," as it were, would make the right kind of wife. There never had been a moment from earliest boyhood when he had ever indulged in any pleasure by sacrificing his home responsibilities. It was in the blood. Nay, more, it was in the county. He slapped the reins on the horse's back.

"No," he said, "we'll go on."

Stung by the injustice of the sudden attitude of one to whom up to the pesent moment there had never been anything but the most ardent adoration, and in whom she had never even suspected such a large vein of sulliness, obstinacy, obtuseness—call it by whatever name one chooses—Lyda's eyes blazed. But with a feminine restrain she held herself together. Here was a chance to test this lover, so suddenly revealed in a new light. She smiled, as she said slowly, as if measuring her words:

"I'd stop work at any time if I could have some fun. Why shouldn't I? I can tell you I'm not going to be a drudge all my life."

Horace drove on silently.

"If you think I'm going to be tied down to a house all the time, you're mistaken. I'm not that kind."

No reply from Horace, and neither spoke again during the journey to the fair grounds.

Arriving there, Horace put up his horse in the shed and Lyda joined the crowd. Presently he came back, and they walked along together, still silent. Soon, however, Lyda caught sight of some one she knew, a young man named Stenhall, who lived over the line in the next county.

"Hello, George!" she cried.

"Hello, Lyda! Hello, Horace! Come over to the dancing pavilion."

"I'm not interested in dancing," said Horace sullenly.

"Well, I am," said Lyda. "And you can come or not," she whispered. "I m going to have a good time."

Thereafter Horace caught glimpses of her in the distance having her "good time" with other friends, for Lyda, being a pretty and vivacious girl, was a general favorite, while he took a sedentary interest in the stock exhibits. At six o'clock he came up to her.

"Are you reay to go home?" he asked.

"Yes, if it is time," she returned.

"I've had a splendid time," she said. His denseness—for men are peculiarly dense about some things—prevented him from detecting that slightly raised note in a woman's voice which indicates unmistakably that she is playing a part.

He made no reply, but in another moment drove out in the buggy. She got in, and they silently proceeded on their home journey. Neither spoke.

It was dark when they reached her cottage. He got out first, and stood silently as she jumped to the ground without assistance.

"Will you come in?" she said politely.

"No; it's late."

"I'm much obliged for the ride. Good night." She turned up the path.

"Lyda!" His voice cut the darkness.

"Well?"

"You're not the kind of girl I thought you were."

"I'm glad of it. I wouldn't be the kind of girl you thought I was—for anything! You want a girl who is ready to stick home and make a slave of herself all the time. Well, you're right I'm not that kind."

"No, I don't," he said slowly, "I like a good time as well as anyone, but I wouldn't let my mother stay home and work. And you flirted—you know you did."

She drew from her finger a small diamond ring and handed it back to him. "Here," she said, "Horace Trumbell, you take back your ring. I guess we didn't understand each other, and it's a mighty good thing we found out in time. I wouldn't marry you—no! not for the world. And now you're free!"

"He stared at her almost blindly in the half-darkness. Without a word he took the ring. Without a word he turned, clicked the gate behind him, got into his buggy, and drove off down the road to his home.

Arriving there he put up his horse and went in. His mother was waiting for him.

"Have a good time, "Horace?"

"Yes."

She looked at him keenly. Something had happened.

"Why, what's the matter?"

He sat down wearily.

"Lyda and I have cut loose."

"Why Horace! What's the meaning of that?"

"She's not the kind of girl I thought. She wouldn't do—for me."

He bitterly recounted the tale of the afternoon and his mother raised her hands.

"Oh, Horace," she said, "why didn't you wait? Didn't you know that Mrs. Newton was at the fair all day yesterday?"

"No. What of it?"

"Why, Lyda insisted on her going. She told me so last night at the church rehearsal. She went and had a good time, and she said then there never was such a girl as Lyda to do her share. And so today, when you called, it was only right that Lyda should have gone. Of course, you didn't wait to have it explained. You said something she didn't like. Oh, I know you! I see it all. Of course she flirted. I'd have done the same thing. It's too bad. I—"

Horace started up. The chill red color came into his tanned face. A sudden, tremendous revolution was taking place within him.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I see—now. Oh, Mother, I've made a mistake! I must go right back."

A little later he knocked at the Newton cottage. Lyda opened the door herself. The moon made everything so light that they could see each other distinctly. The girl did not ask him in. Instead, she nearly closed the door and stood outside, her hands behind her holding the knob.

"Lyda, I've come back."

"For what?"

"I was wrong. I did not understand. I thought you had neglected your work—for pleasure, and it made me angry. I didn't treat you right, Lyda. I know now you had a perfect right to go."

The girl looked away from him, through the honeysckle-wreathed pergola out across the moon-lighted expanse of meadow. She said nothing in reply. He waited. At last he spoke.

"Won't you take me back?"

"No." There was no bitterness in her voice.

"I've talked it over with Mother," she said quietly, "and I guess I'd better not. I'm sorry, but—" she opened the door and drew back into it—"you didn't trust me."

"Lyda, I'd never do it again."

But the girl shook her head slowly, in that unmistakable way which conveyed to him there was no hope.

"Yes you would," she said. "You couldn't help doing it, because you're that kind."

Was she right? E. W.

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